



COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and Georgia Department of Public Health (GaDPH) recently released [Georgia's Path to Recovery for K-12 Schools](#), a guidance document that provides a tiered approach for safely returning students and employees to school buildings in the 2020-2021 school year amid the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. The guidance provides a framework with recommended practices based on varying level of community spread, as defined by your local department of public health.

State charter schools, like all local school districts, have flexibility to implement a pandemic plan that best suits the needs of their individual communities. The GaDOE and GaDPH guidance is not mandated and is a tool to assist schools. Through broad flexibility waivers, state charter schools can already implement many of the recommended practices, such as modifying school calendars and instructional time and methods.

As the oversight body to state charter schools, the SCSC has an obligation to ensure that each school's plan aligns with state and federal requirements. To that end, **each state charter school must submit a pandemic plan for review to the SCSC by July 24th**. Additionally, throughout the 2020-21 school year, schools must notify the SCSC upon altering their pandemic plan or shifting to a different phase of the plan based on level of community spread. In addition to the GaDOE and GaDPH guidance, pandemic plans should, at a minimum, address the following areas of operation.

Infectious Disease. Review and update, if necessary, your school's infectious disease policy. Infectious Disease Policy guidelines are located in State Board of Education (SBOE) [Rule 160-1-3-.03](#). The pandemic plan should include:

- Protocols for responding to confirmed cases of COVID-19;
- Processes for communicating with public health authorities to monitor COVID-19 transmission;
- Plans for communicating with stakeholders;
- Plans for safeguarding student information pursuant to FERPA;
- And, counseling students or staff reasonably suspected of COVID-19 infection.

Facilities. The pandemic plan should detail facility modifications necessary to comply with health department guidelines, such as social distancing and capacity limitations. Consider whether existing public health guidance requires updates to the school's visitor and cleaning/sanitation policies. Relevant guidance may be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹ and Georgia Department of Education websites.² In addition, ensure that, where applicable, your school remains in compliance with OSHA guidance and standards.³

¹ [Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities; Social Distancing](#)

² [Facility Information for Charter Schools](#)

³ [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)



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Academic Calendar. Consider what, if any, modifications to the academic calendar may be necessary to implement public health protocols. For example:

- Should the school modify its calendar to facilitate implementation of virtual learning elements?
- What, if any, modifications should be made to before or after school care services or extracurricular activities? If your school is considering modifications to its academic calendar, review SBOE [Rule 160-5-1-.02](#) for school day and GaDOE notice requirements and ensure that any revisions consider the applicable QBE funding model.

Attendance Policies. When considering updates to attendance policies, consider what, if any, flexibility will be afforded to students and staff to protect against COVID-19 transmission, particularly for vulnerable populations or to address the impact of exposure to students and staff with disabilities. In addition:

- Review applicable legal requirements, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and consider how the school will evaluate requests for accommodations or leave.
- The pandemic plan should consider excused absence and other attendance requirements relevant to illness⁴ and review available guidance for serving students with disabilities.⁵

Instructional Delivery Model, including plans for in-person and virtual instruction. The school's pandemic plan must include a weekly schedule that reflects when and how students, teachers, and staff are required to report. Additionally, your pandemic plan should:

- Specify to what degree, if any, the school will implement remote/distance or virtual learning and the rationale for doing so (i.e. pandemic guidance, community surveys etc.).
- Consider how your school will assess readiness given lost instructional time from the previous school year and how the school will monitor and track student progress.
- Describe how the school will ensure that all students have access to modified instructional models (i.e. Does each student have a device and internet connectivity?)

⁴ [SBOE Rule 160-5-1-.10 \(Student Attendance\)](#)

⁵ [USDOE Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)



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Transportation. *If your school provides transportation, please ensure that your pandemic plan addresses modifications to transportation services and how your school community will be notified of changes. Further, if your school is eliminating or reducing transportation services, please include drop-off and pick-up or other procedures governing student transit. Your plan must include any precautions or protocols the school intends to implement to limit potential COVID-19 exposure in providing transportation and a plan for addressing transportation needs in the case of a COVID-19 outbreak. The school may find the [CDC Guidance for Bus Transit Operators](#) helpful for planning.*

Food Service. *Your pandemic plan should address implementation of GaDPH procedures for food service and discuss modifications the school will make in the case of a COVID-19 outbreak, including, but not limited to whether the school will continue to provide meal services. Guidance is located on the GaDOE website.⁶*

Communication with Stakeholders. *The pandemic plan should explain how the school will communicate COVID-19-related modifications to its programs or services. Schools may find GaDOE⁷ and U.S. Department of Education guidance⁸ instructive in planning.*

The above information is provided to guide state charter schools towards comprehensive pandemic planning. Although this document contains suggestions for consideration, your school's pandemic plan should not be limited by the same. Your plan should consider the specific risk level associated with your school and community populations.

Pandemic plans should be submitted to Cerrone Lockett, SCSC General Counsel, by email (Cerrone.Lockett@scsc.georgia.gov) on or before July 24, 2020. If you have additional questions, please contact SCSC staff.

⁶ [Georgia USDA Waivers for School Nutrition Programs; COVID-19 Guidance for Restaurants with Dining Room Seating](#)

⁷ [Pandemic Planning: Information for Georgia Public School Districts](#)

⁸ [FERPA & Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Frequently Asked Questions](#)